Living City

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SUPPLEMENT

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WORD OF LIFE

"He who is faithful in a very little
is faithful also in much..."
(Luke 16:10)

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Have you ever felt in your heart the esire to accomplish great things? You ust have.

Have you ever been attracted to eople - like heroes or saints - who knew ow to step out of the norm because ey accomplished important and noble orks worthy of admiration? I believe so.

It is an aspiration common to every an because he has a great destiny.

Unfortunately, however, most of the me man is incapable of fulfilling his estiny because he is unable to find a way o cope with those particularly decisive nd difficult situations which life entails.

If you don't mind, I will suggest to ou a way to do this.

Here are Jesus' words: "*He who is aithful in a very little is faithful also in uch...*"

These words existed before Christ and robably were a proverb. Jesus used them n his teaching, giving them a new mean- ng. These words appear in the Gospel of uke in a passage where Jesus speaks bout money. They have, therefore, a gnificance mainly on an economic plane ut they can be applied to countless tuations in life, as well. Jesus, with these ords, underlines that being faithful in he little things is a sure test for knowing one will be just as faithful in the big ings.

Moreover, if Jesus asks for faithfulness the little things, then nothing which fe demands of us is small. Nothing we o is small if we do it in order to fulfill s will. Nothing is small if it is done out f love.

"*He who is faithful in a very little is ithful also in much...*"

How many little things there are in our everyday life!

There is the table to clear, that answer to give, that boring, monotonous job which must be finished, that car to drive, that study to complete, that meal to prepare, that activity to organize, that instrument to play, that dress to hang up, that paper to pick up, that smile to offer, that article to write, that happy event to share.

How, then, do we perform these little actions?

We must never do things in haste, but rather, we must do everything perfectly. We have to project ourselves - with all our being - into what we have to do.

Faithfulness in little things means to live well the present moment of our life.

"*He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much.*"

Yes, "*in much,*" like in those crucial situations in life: a serious accident, a natural disaster which you live through, the death of someone dear to you, that success which could go to your head, an inheritance which you didn't expect, a deep and unexpected sorrow, a responsibility suddenly given to you...

And in certain nations, all the unforeseen hardships of war.

I will tell you about a twenty-one year old Lebanese boy whose name is Fouad. He had learned well how to love in everyday situations of life, in the little things. But, not too long ago, something out of the ordinary happened.

On his way back to Lebanon from a convention in Rome, some armed men stopped him on the road to Beirut about three miles from the airport. It was a difficult moment for he was in a Muslim zone. The militants read on his I.D. card, "Christian-Maronite."

"Yes, I am a Christian-Maronite," Fouad said, "and I'm on my way home."

"You're coming with us," they said to him.

Then, they interrogated him. At the end, they told him, "Do you know what is in store for you?" Fouad understood this was his end. One of the militants took him to a bridge where several Christians had already been killed. While walking to the bridge, Fouad tried to remain calm and he thought of what God might want from him in this moment. It was clear that he had to love his neighbor. Therefore he tried to make his captor feel loved. He told him, "Your job must be difficult, depressing... carrying on this war... " As they drew near the bridge, his guard stopped, looked at him and exclaimed, "Let's go back!"

When they reached the headquarters, Fouad saw his guard speaking to the other men. One of them came over to tell him, "You are lucky, because a few days ago, his brother was killed." This was as if to say, "If there were someone who could have a reason to kill you, this would be he."

So Fouad, who had lived before God in all the little events of his life, was able to remain faithful to God in this experience as well.

"*He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much.*"

And God saved him.

CHIARA LUBICH

Divine moments

by Eva Battistone

I had gone through many difficulties to get to the Mariapolis (1) this year. But I said that I would go leaving everything behind... my shop, my family and so on. After the first talk of the Mariapolis on Monday, I experienced something deep in my soul. I realized I had to put everything aside and try to be open to what God wanted from me in the present moment. I said my "yes" to him and to whatever he wanted, even though I did not know what it might be. I placed everything in his hands, especially some confusion going on in my family. When I called them that first night I found that Jesus had taken over and things were going well.

One morning, during the Mariapolis, I was praying to God asking him to give me the strength to remain strong in my commitment to him. I prayed because I was experiencing a certain fear... a fear and a joy at the same time. I felt I had understood the cross for the first time. I know that the moment I had chosen God, I had also embraced the cross. But there was a fear, not that God would let me down, but that I would not do his will in the way he wanted. During Mass, when I received Jesus, I asked him this: that I could live all that life had in store for me with courage and not with fear. I had such a strong desire to do whatever he wanted, no matter what. And I was determined never again to ask, "why me?"

Those moments were very powerful for me, I felt renewed and experienced a great happiness.

I returned home after the Mariapolis and went back to work. It was during this time that my mother became seriously ill.

My mother was one of the most important people in my life; and she, too, was trying to live this life of unity. We were very close and spent a great deal of time together. I remember a particular day when I had been wondering how I could ever leave my mom knowing that she was such a strong and beautiful influence in my life. I do not know why I had chosen that particular time to think about that. Perhaps it was because I was understanding more and more that my "yes" to Jesus was to give up everything that was near and dear to me in order to choose him first. I remember discussing this with my mother and I noticed she had tears in her eyes. Was it for my obvious happiness at having said yes to Jesus or was it because she had not understood?

One morning — it was a Thursday — my mother and I had gone to Mass together. Though she was not feeling too well, she said she thought it was a really beautiful day. When I left for work she was picking flowers in the garden. At 12:30 in the afternoon she called me at the shop to say she was feeling worse. For the first time I really became concerned and dropped everything to hurry home. I took her to the doctor's office where he gave her a cardiogram. It was decided that my mom was to go immediately to the hospital. The relationship that she and I shared during that time was really beautiful and supernatural because we were both trying to live the same life. It was very easy to talk about God in the present situation.

When we arrived at the hospital my mom was placed in intensive care. A priest was called and she received the sacrament of the sick that evening. She got progressively worse and I realized, for the first time, that she might die. At the same time what came to my mind was the "yes" I had given God. Though it was a difficult moment for me, I did not want to go back on my word to him.

I spent all of the next day at the hospital, determined to remain with my mother as long as I could. That night she looked at me and said, "Go home and take care of your father." This was something that would have been impossible for me to do had I not been trying to live my "yes" at all moments. Still, I asked my mom to let me stay because I wanted to keep Jesus in the midst with her. (2) But she said, "Go." She looked at the crucifix next to her bed, then added, "We will be able to keep Jesus in our midst at a distance."

As soon as I arrived home I received a call to go back to the hospital. She had suffered another attack which was worse than the first one. Driving to the hospital that night I experienced a deep suffering. At a certain moment I thought, "I wish God would take all this away from me." Almost immediately, my "yes" came back to my mind and I kept repeating it over and over again. I knew that with that first "yes" in the Mariapolis he had prepared me for this day.

A specialist was called to relieve the pressure on my mom's heart by inserting a long needle into her chest. He advised me to act and speak only in a way which would keep her calm because he could not give her a sedative for that particular procedure. My nature was never able to bear the sight of pain or blood, but that night I held my mom's hand while the doctor inserted the needle and tube into her heart. I could see she was in pain, and I said, "Ma, let's share this together and do it for Jesus." I wanted to give my life for her but I realized that all I could do was give her all of myself so that Jesus would be there with us.

There was nothing more anyone could do. It was now very early on Saturday morning and I left the room for a few moments to call a friend of mine at the Focolare. We agreed being one heart and one mind to pray together to God, that Mary, his mother, would be present the moment my mom died to take her immediately to God. I cannot express in words the power of that prayer in unity.

I returned to the room. I held my mother's hands. She opened her eyes, I told her, "Mom, I love you. You are going to heaven. Mary, the mother of Jesus is here, ... she's waiting for you." With that she opened her eyes wider, then closed them and stretched out her hand.

Soon after that the doctors came and I told them that my mom was dead. I felt a special gratitude for them, for not once did they interfere. They all stood around, silent. However, at that moment they said that according to the law they had to try to revive her.

The atmosphere was really beautiful. It was not my imagination..., it was beautiful. I prayed that God would give me the strength to tell my father in a way that would not put him also in danger of a heart attack. And I felt at that moment the promise of Jesus at the Mariapolis that he would give me the

The father's love

A man in the railway car is talking about his son who has just got his degree in medicine; he says, with pride that he is already curing sick people. Another, a countryman to judge from his appearance, remarks that his daughter has married a lawyer with a bright future ahead of him. The lady opposite interrupts saying that while her children are still at school they are already showing exceptional intelligence.

These are the dreams, hopes, satisfactions of parental pride. But will not the parent who has a daughter with marriage problems, or a son who is a good for nothing, a rebel, a delinquent also defend and excuse his own offspring?

If you bring up the subject of mother or father at school, or watching television or during some other ordinary event of the day, one person will become sad, silent, another smile, another curse, yet others will console themselves by looking back and talking of "the good times past."

I listen and imagine the thoughts of those people who say nothing and of so many other people that I know. Every father, and every mother hopes for a dream to come true for their child who is still in the cradle. They wish for them a brilliant career, respect and joy, beauty, a happy marriage, goodness and generosity. But life is different, and one accepts it as it is. One adapts to it, sometimes one reacts against it. Each person is free to act as he sees fit.

Most people say, "If he or she is content, that is enough," or even, "It is sufficient that we have health and enough to live on..." Many people repeat "at least we wish each other well." Their own dreams are reduced in order not to spoil that little bit of joy which life bestows.

Those who are already grown up say, "My father would have liked me to become a lawyer, or an architect," or even "my mother dreamt that I would become a priest but..."

One does not know, however, whether they are content with their own choice.

I find myself asking, "But does God, who is our Father have a dream for his creatures when they come to life? If one can say that God dreams, of course."

Nevertheless, he has created wonders throughout the ages with an imagination as vast as the universe, and a perfection of microscopic detail. Will he not also have made, with that same creative splendor, a plan of life, a marvellous destiny for the human creatures who are his sons? Since it is he who has created the human heart is it not perhaps he himself who is the inspiration of the desires of every father and mother?

Yes, God traces for every man a wonderful pattern of life, great as he himself is great. But even he, like human parents, respects the liberty of his children. Having designed in each person an exact and wonderful future, everyone is left free to shape it in his or her own way, to turn life away from its own trajectory and so fail to realize his or her full potential as a person.

Who, in fact, does feel that he has completely fulfilled himself?

Do not many parents say, "Provided that we want what is good."?

Indeed, even people who have had a bad life, who are rebels, criminals, tramps, if they succeed in loving and giving themselves, they come out of themselves and enter into the paternal circle, the family circle. The trajectory or thrust of life corrects itself since the Father is capable of all things and can make a discordant note the beginning of a new symphony. It is enough to give our Father our life which is incomplete, to come out of ourselves and enter his universe which is where we wish each other well as brothers. In that universe there is room for every dream and every desire to be realized.

Dori Zamboni

ength came true. That, plus the help all my friends who were trying to ep Jesus in the midst with me during is time, made me realize the power of s presence.

When I returned home some of my ends were there to help. I was so ppy to see them, also because my om had a particular love for them, too. was another beautiful experience of keeping Jesus in the midst so that what would remain would not be the grief and tears but a certain awareness of joy and gratitude that my mom was in Paradise. God always answers our prayers. My mother's wish was that, when she died she would not linger. She wanted to die quickly, "... with all the Sacraments," and with someone of the family present. She died in just that way. I never knew that before, but when I told my dad that I was with her at the end, he recalled her wishes of years before and recounted them to me. It made me more aware of the mercy of God and grateful for those last moments which were so divine. ■

(1) Mariapolis: the summer gathering of the Focolare Movement.
(2) Matthew 18:20 "For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them."

Experiences

Each month a "word of life" appears in Living City or its Supplement. The following are experiences that some of our readers shared with us in living the word of life.

It was my first day on a new job and I was extremely nervous. The job was at a small boutique which specialized in custom sewing. My duty was to trim and finish the clothes. This particular day I was working on a very intricate wedding dress. It was covered with small daisy lace and I was to sew a pearl in the center of every daisy. About 4:00 in the afternoon, the lady who owned the boutique had to go on some errands and I was left alone. Soon after she left, the bride, whose wedding dress we had been sewing all day, came in. She was extremely upset because the dress was not completely finished. She started to yell at me though I was not responsible for her anger. My first instinct was just to shout right back at her, but I remembered to love Jesus in her. So, I offered to work as quickly as I could to finish the dress within a half hour. However, she shouted some more and told me to help her try on the wedding dress. It turned out to be too tight around the arms. I asked her to stand still until I could gently remove it. But she moved her arms and tore an arm of the dress. Again, she was very angry and I remembered the word of life, "Give and it will be given to you" (Lk. 6:38). I felt then that I could give more of myself and not return her anger. I explained to her with much love that the dress could be repaired and everything finished by the next day. She left calmer than she had been before and I was filled with the joy of Jesus.

P. M.

One of our children is seriously ill, and at times needs my constant care and attention.

During one of these periods of his elusiveness, I was preparing him for bed, and tending to his personal needs. He became very uncooperative, and being a big child, made it very difficult for me to handle the situation.

I got very upset, as it had been a long hard day, and I was mentally and physically exhausted. I left the room, saying, "If this is how you are going to behave, I just won't help you."

Sitting at the kitchen table trying to pull myself together, I began to cry. I was angry not at him, but myself.

I thought of the word of life we were living that month, "Love your enemies." How could I apply it here? Surely my child was not my enemy. I truly love him. The enemy for me in that moment, was my own exhaustion, and my son's lack of cooperation. Jesus was asking me to love him in all these things that are beyond human control. I felt relieved, as I said "yes" to Jesus, and thanked him for this opportunity to love him even more.

I started back to my son's room, just as he was coming out saying "OK mom, please come back, I'm ready to cooperate, and I'm sorry for giving you a hard time."

I smiled as I hugged him, because God's personal love for each one of us was very apparent.

A. H.

WORD OF LIFE

OCTOBER 1978

"If anyone comes to me
and does not hate his father
and mother, his wife and children,
his brothers, and sisters — yes, even
his own life — he cannot be my
disciple."

(Luke 14:26)

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